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ABSTRACT

This booklet is designed to help parents understand how Washington schools are raising their academic standards. It also points out questions parents should ask about their children's schools and describes some at-home activities that will help a child make the most of time in and out of the classroom. The educational improvement effort in Washington encompasses clear and challenging standards, a focus on reading as the foundation for learning, measurement of each student's progress, the reduction of bureaucratic rules and regulations, and accountability. One level of accountability will be the Certificate of Mastery that each student will be required to earn before high school graduation. The state's new standards are a blend of general goals and more specific items for elementary, middle, and high school students. The general goals are called "essential academic learning requirements." Examples are given of these essential learning requirements in mathematics. Washington will be using a new assessment system to measure student achievement. Tests will be given to all students in grades 4, 7, and 10 to see how well students and schools are doing, and schools will use other assessments more frequently to evaluate student progress. These tests can be the basis for parent questions about how well the child and the school are doing. Ten questions parents ought to ask about their children's schools are listed. These include questions about curriculum and teaching, the use of educational technology, the approach to student diversity of learning styles and backgrounds, and matters of school policy, such as discipline. Parents can help children become eager and effective learners if they feed their children's curiosity and encourage their children to develop strong relationships with other adults who support parental efforts to raise healthy and successful children. Some activities to do at home are described for each of the eight academic subject areas covered by the new standards. Parent participation in the schools is highlighted as a way to know what is really happening in school. (SLD)

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ED 425 211

Partnership For Learning

What parents should know about Washington's new, higher academic standards.

# A PARENT'S GUIDE TO YOUR CHILD'S ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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Because of a sweeping school improvement law adopted in 1993, Washington state now has clear, rigorous academic standards for what every student is expected to know and be able to do by graduation.

Washington's new, higher standards are good news for you and your child. Public schools will have higher expectations of all students. You and your child will know what academic standards he or she is expected to meet. And all the curriculum, books, tests, teacher training, and administrative support in your school will be focused on helping students meet or exceed the new academic standards.

Moreover, your child will begin taking tests that will tell you exactly which skills and knowledge he or she has learned well - which standards your child met or exceeded - not just whether he or she is above or below some unspecified "national average." And these tests will tell you how well your child's school is doing at ensuring success for all children.

The new law also gives parents and local communities more power to design school programs, and more responsibility for holding their schools accountable for improving students' academic performance.

**This booklet is designed to help you understand how Washington schools are raising their academic standards; to arm you with the right questions to find out what you need to know about your child's school; and to provide you with strategies and at-home activities that will help your child make the most out of his or her time in the classroom.**

Even the very best schools can't succeed by themselves; they need active, engaged parents and community members. As many studies have shown — and as every teacher knows from personal experience — nothing is more important to your child's success in school than your direct involvement in his or her education. And nothing is more important to the success of your child's school than your active participation.

The immense investment Washington state is making to raise standards and improve schools really depends on parents like you - parents who ask questions, get involved, and hold schools accountable for helping every child learn the skills and knowledge needed to succeed.

# EDUCATION MATTERS

MOST PARENTS STILL HAVE THE ATTITUDES ABOUT SCHOOL THAT WE LEARNED WHEN WE WERE STUDENTS.

Those of us who liked school and did well expect our children to enjoy school as much as we did; those of us who were bored, miserable, intimidated or unsuccessful in school often fear that our children will have to struggle through similar experiences. For some of us, just walking into a school building brings back a jumbled mix of memories and emotions we'd rather not experience.

But if we really want our own child to succeed - and equally important, to enjoy the many hours of his or her young life that will be spent in the classroom - we have to think carefully about how the world has changed since we were students.

There are three changes that will make an immense difference for children...

## THE BASICS...PLUS

Every child needs to learn higher levels of skill and knowledge than ever before to succeed in the high-tech, highly-competitive global economy of the coming century.

Schools should give children a strong grounding in the basics - making sure they can write persuasively, read, use correct grammar and spelling, perform math functions accurately, understand key scientific concepts - plus the ability to apply these skills and knowledge to solve problems, propose solutions, work in teams, and adapt to changing technologies.

## WHAT WORKS

In the past two decades, educators have learned a great deal about how children's learning styles vary, and how teachers can engage the interest of those who learn in different ways. We also know more about how to overcome learning disabilities that weren't even recognized in the past. And we know which programs are consistently useful at helping children learn to read or master mathematics.

When this research is put to use, schools can do much better at ensuring every child learns more.

## CHOICES

When we went to school, the ideal of public education was that schools should all be alike, and all students should attend the school nearest their home. However, one size shouldn't fit all: different kinds of kids need different kinds of schools.

Some children need a lot of structure and direction; some thrive in schools where children decide for themselves what to learn and when to learn it; some children learn best when they're taught in connection with the one subject that captivates them most - like science, or the arts, or their own cultural heritage.

State law now allows parents to send their children to any public school that has space for them. And in many communities, there is a much broader range of schools from which to choose than there used to be. In addition, many parents and public school advocates are working for even more choices, such as "charter school" arrangements that let groups of teachers and parents run their own public schools in exchange for guaranteeing improvements in student achievement, attendance, and other results.

**As parents, all of us need to understand that no matter how well or how badly we did in school, our own children need to learn more than we did. Our job is to make sure they do.**

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What every parent ought to bear in mind is this: The most important factor in students' academic success is parent involvement. The more time you spend helping your child learn - and the more directly involved you are with your child's school - the better your child's chances for success in school and in life.

# HIGHER EXPECTATIONS,
# BETTER RESULTS

The philosophy of Washington's school improvement act is simple: If we expect more from children, they'll learn more. And if we set clear academic standards that define what all students should learn, we can hold schools accountable for achieving results rather than merely following regulations.

Specifically, this effort in Washington state encompasses a common-sense plan for improving schools and increasing student achievement:

1. **Set clear and challenging standards** for what students should know and be able to do in writing, math, science, and other important subject areas.
2. **Focus on reading as the foundation for learning** by making sure students don't leave 2nd grade without strong reading skills.
3. **Measure each student's progress** toward meeting these standards.
4. **Reduce bureaucratic rules and regulations** to let teachers focus on student learning and to give communities more say over their local schools.
5. **Hold students and schools accountable for results.**

## DEFINING THE STANDARDS

Since 1993, parents, teachers, employers and citizens from all over the state have worked to reach a consensus on what students ought to learn in school. This consensus is reflected in Washington's new academic standards, called the "Essential Academic Learning Requirements."

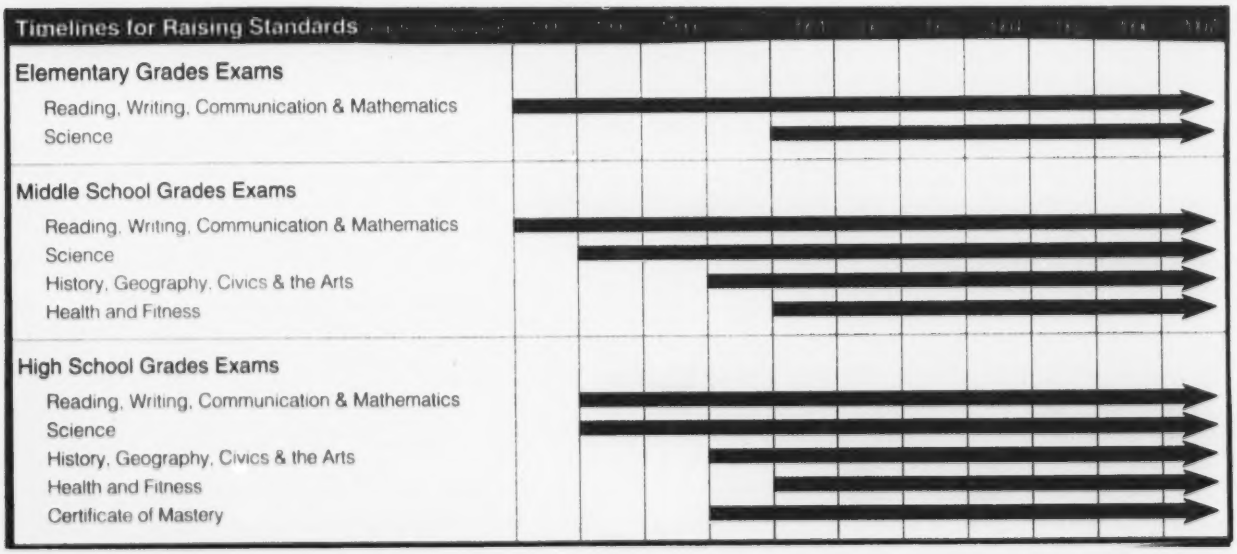
To ensure that all students learn a common core of skills and knowledge no matter where they go to school, all schools in Washington will be measured against the state standards and statewide tests will help determine whether students are meeting those standards.

The new standards cover eight subject areas:

- Reading
- Writing
- Communication
- Mathematics
- Science
- Social sciences (history, geography, civics, and economics)
- Arts
- Health and fitness

## LOCAL FLEXIBILITY

The 1993 law leaves it up to local communities to choose the curriculum, textbooks, teaching methods, and programs that best help students reach the new standards. And it




*The darkened portion of the above arrows indicates when the Certificate of Mastery and each subject area test become mandatory. During the time covered by the light color portion of the arrows, these measures will be available but participation by schools will be at school district discretion. The Commission on Student Learning - the citizen panel overseeing development of these changes - has recommended that the Certificate of Mastery become a requirement for students graduating in the year 2006 (these students enter high school in the year 2002). However, under state law, the Certificate does not become a graduation requirement until the State Board of Education judges the 10th grade tests as reliable and valid.*



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encourages local school districts to reach for even higher standards of performance than those required by the state. While progress has been made to meet these "deregulation" goals, most observers agree the state still needs to do more.

## Holding Schools Accountable

Washington's school improvement act puts in place three levels of accountability to ensure the new standards are being met:

1. **School Report Cards: Information for parents and community members to track progress in their local schools**

   Giving local parents and communities a powerful new way to hold schools accountable for student learning, each school will issue an annual "report card" that tells how its students measure up to the new statewide academic standards. Members of the public may request these report cards to keep track of how well schools in their area are performing.

2. **Certificate of Mastery: An incentive for students to work hard and reach for higher standards**

   Each student must earn a Certificate of Mastery, certifying that he or she has achieved the standards before graduating from high school (see sidebar).

3. **System Accountability: A way to make sure schools fulfill their responsibility to teach students well**

   Schools that are having trouble meeting standards will receive assistance in doing so. Those that consistently exceed standards will be rewarded for their accomplisments. And, in cases where schools are unable to meet standards over a number of years, intervention will be undertaken to help them accomplish the job.

The most important principle of the new law is this: Parents ought to know what their children are learning - not just how they compare to some unspecified "national average." Clear academic standards and good tests that measure what students really know and can do will give parents more specific information - and more power to help their children learn all they'll need to know in order to succeed in school and in life.

The Certificate of Mastery:

## Credential of Achievement

There was a time when a high school diploma guaranteed to parents, employers, and college officials that a high school graduate had mastered a common core of skills and knowledge. But today we find example after example that a high school diploma, by itself, is not enough.

In part, that's because students have sometimes been graduated simply for showing up at classes or doing the minimum possible work. This has meant that the diploma, in many cases, was no guarantee of their skills or knowledge.

The new Certificate of Mastery is a credential that students will earn by working hard at learning - not a credential that will be bestowed for spending the required number of hours sitting in school.

Under current plans, these Certificates will be voluntary for students beginning in 2000 and become a requirement for graduation in 2006.

In most cases, the Certificate will be earned in 10th Grade, but since students learn at different rates, it may be achieved at an earlier or later date, depending on the individual.

Students will take an examination – showing their best work and demonstrating their knowledge and analytical skills – before being presented with the Certificate.

When you as a parent see that your child has earned the Certificate of Mastery, you will know that he or she has demonstrated skills and abilities that meet or exceed consistent and rigorous standards set for them.

# WHAT IS A STANDARD?

The idea behind setting standards is simple. Standards define what it takes to know or do something well - whether it's competing in the long jump, flying a plane, practicing medicine, or writing a well-argued essay. Standards are oriented not to the lowest common denominator, but rather to quality, excellence, and proficiency. They are clear, specific benchmarks against which individual performance and progress can be judged. Unless you clearly define what you want to accomplish - regardless of the task - you'll never have a way of figuring out how best to achieve it.

Washington's new standards are a blend of relatively general goals and more specific items for elementary, middle, and high school students.

The general goals in the standards are called "essential academic learning requirements." The specific grade-level items under each standard are called "benchmarks." To "meet the standard" on the new state exams, students will need to earn a certain score. This score is the level of performance which demonstrates a student has achieved the skill and knowledge described in the essential academic learning requirements.

### SOME EXAMPLES

Listed below in mathematics are the new essential academic learning requirements along with examples of some of the benchmarks fourth, seventh, and tenth graders are expected to meet in these areas. Also included are examples of the types of questions in these subject areas that students will need to be able to answer to be prepared for the new state tests.

## STANDARDS FOR MATHEMATICS

**ESSENTIAL ACADEMIC LEARNING REQUIREMENTS**
*These are the broad goals for what every student ought to learn in mathematics:*

1. The student understands and applies the concepts and procedures of mathematics (including number sense, measurement, geometry, probability/statistics, and algebra).
2. The student uses mathematics to define and solve problems.
3. The student uses mathematical reasoning.
4. The student communicates knowledge and understanding in both everyday and mathematical language.
5. The student understands how mathematical ideas connect within mathematics, to other subject areas, and to real-life situations.

To see a complete copy of Washington's new standards in mathematics - or in any of the other subject areas - or to see other examples of sample test questions, call Partnership for Learning at 1-800-550-5437.

# 4TH GRADE MATHEMATICS

**BENCHMARKS**
*To achieve the broad goals, 4th grade students will be expected to learn these and other specific mathematics skills and knowledge:*

- Add, subtract, multiply, and divide whole numbers.
- Understand concepts of perimeter, area, and volume.
- Use directly measurable attributes (such as length, perimeter, area, volume/capacity, angle, weight/mass, money, and temperature) to describe and compare objects.
- Search for patterns in simple situations.
- Check for reasonableness of results.
- Express ideas using mathematical language and notation (such as charts, graphs, or symbols).
- Express mathematical ideas to familiar people using everday language.

**TEST QUESTIONS**

1 $9\overline{)820}$

Estimate the answer to this problem.

Show how you found your estimate.

2

*Eddie wants to find the height of the school flagpole to the left. The only measuring tool Eddie has is a 12-inch ruler.*

Tell one way Eddie can figure out the height of the flagpole. Explain all your steps clearly. Use words, numbers, or pictures.

# 7TH GRADE MATHEMATICS

**BENCHMARKS**
*To achieve the broad goals, 7th grade students will be expected to learn these and other specific mathematics skills and knowledge:*

- Compare and order whole numbers, fractions, and decimals.
- Use estimation to predict computation results and to determine the reasonableness of answers involving rational numbers (such as estimating a tip).
- Know how to conduct experiments and simulations and to compare results with mathematical expectations.
- Understand the relationship among units within both the U.S. and metric systems.
- Calculate and use mean, median, and mode as appropriate in describing a set of data.
- Use reading, listening, and observation skills to access and extract mathematical information from multiple sources.
- Identify mathematical patterns and ideas in other disciplines.

**TEST QUESTIONS**

1 *Mr. Morales wants to cover the 20 ft. by 8 ft. wall of his family room with brick. The face of the brick chosen is 7 1/2 in. by 3 1/2 in., and the mortar spaces between bricks is 1/2 in. wide.*

How many bricks will Mr. Morales need to completely cover the wall? Explain in detail how you found your answer.

2 If the numbers 2/5, 0.26, 1/4, 0.275, and 255/1000 were ordered from least to greatest, which of these would be the middle number?

**a.** 0.26 **b.** 0.275 **c.** 255/1000 **d.** 1/4

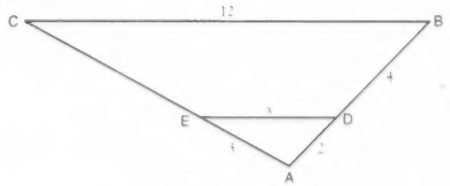
# 10TH GRADE MATHEMATICS

**BENCHMARKS**

*To achieve the broad goals, 10th grade students will be expected to learn these and other specific mathematics skills and knowledge*

- Understand and apply the concepts of ratio and both direct and indirect proportion.
- Understand how changes in dimension affect perimeter, area, and volume.
- Understand and use appropriate counting procedures to determine probabilities.
- Use statistics to support different points of view, for example, in a debate or a position paper.
- Identify what information is missing or extraneous in a problem and compensate for it.
- Test conjectures and inferences by formulating a proof or by constructing a counterexample.
- Organize, clarify, and refine mathematical information in multiple ways, including verbalizing, discussing, or writing.

**TEST QUESTIONS**

1 


If triangles ADE and ABC shown in the figure above are similar, what is the value of x?

**a.** 4 **b.** 5 **c.** 6 **d.** 8 **e.** 10

2 The table shows the cost for different bus fares.

| BUSY BUS COMPANY FARES | |
|---|---|
| ONE WAY | $1.00 |
| WEEKLY PASS | $9.00 |

*Yvonne is trying to decide whether she should buy a weekly bus pass. On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, she rides the bus to and from work. On Tuesday and Thursday, she rides the bus to work, but gets a ride home with her friends.*

Should Yvonne buy a weekly bus pass? Explain your answer.

*The sample test questions for fourth and seventh graders were developed by the Washington Commission on Student Learning. While they haven't been field tested and won't actually appear on the tests, these questions are accurate examples of the types of problems students will see on the new state tests. Since Washington's new tests for tenth graders are still under development and won't be field tested until Spring 1998, sample questions were taken from the National Assessment of Educational Progress 1996 Mathematics Report Card (Question 1) and the National Research Council's Measuring Counts (Question 2).*

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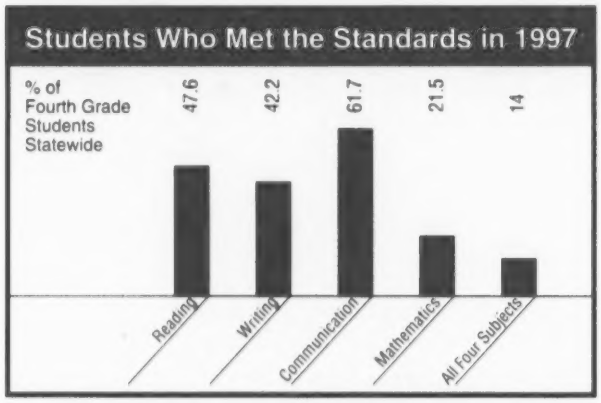
# How will I Know My Child is Measuring Up?

Because of Washington's school improvement act, students are beginning to come home from school with new information about their academic performance. They have test scores showing how well they did in achieving new standards in important subject areas. And they also have information showing how well their school as a whole did to help its students meet these standards. For the first time, both parents and educators have clear information about what is working in the school, how well it's working, and which areas need improvement.




*This chart shows the percentage of Washington fourth graders whose performance meets or exceeds the new state standards. These scores are from the state's new fourth grade test, which was offered voluntarily and for the first time in spring 1997. Beginning in the 1997-98 school year, all fourth graders will be required to take the test. Similar state tests for seventh and tenth graders are beginning to be phased in now; all students in these two grades will be required to take the test beginning in the 2000 - 01 school year. For more information, see the timeline earlier in this booklet.*

These new tests - often called student "assessments" - measure what students know and can do, and whether they are meeting Washington's new standards. There is no point teaching one thing in schools and testing students' knowledge of something else.

Good testing serves two purposes: to provide accountability and to offer specific diagnostic information to make improvements. To meet these two goals, Washington state will administer tests to all fourth, seventh, and tenth graders as a "quality control" device to learn how well schools are doing at ensuring students meet the standards. Schools will administer their own tests and assessments more frequently through the year and at each grade level to continuously track progress and make improvements.

## Good Information

With information from these new tests in hand, school communities can focus their efforts and work together to make changes that improve student performance. If, for instance, a lot of students aren't measuring up in math, the school or teacher will know that they need to change the way they are teaching math. If one student isn't measuring up in math, the teacher will know that student needs extra help, or a different approach.

You can use information from the new testing system to answer four important questions:

- **Is my child succeeding in school?** The new tests will track your child's progress in meeting the new standards.
- **To succeed, what further classroom instruction does my child need?** The new tests will help you and your child's teachers make decisions about where your child needs more help.
- **Is my child's teacher doing a good job?** The new tests will help you evaluate the quality of your child's teacher or teachers.
- **Are we satisfied with this school and school district?**

The new tests will give you information to evaluate how well schools are doing at making sure students reach the standards.

## Tougher Tests for Higher Standards

The new tests don't rely solely on multiple choice questions to figure out what a student knows - which means they are more difficult for students and provide more useful information to teachers and parents. Multiple choice is a quick and useful way to learn some things about what students know and can do, but it can't measure everything.

It's hard to tell how well a student can write a persuasive essay using multiple choice questions or whether a student can design a science experiment. It's also hard to tell on a multiple choice test why a student chose the answer he or she did - did they understand the underlying concept or principle? did they guess? did they understand some things but not others?

That's why Washington's new state testing system asks students to write actual essays, to write out the correct answer rather than always choosing from four choices, and to explain their answers. The state assessment still includes many multiple choice questions which will measure certain skills and knowledge. But it also includes other questions that will measure more complex, but equally important, skills and knowledge - questions that ask students to think, to write, to make judgments, and to communicate their reasoning.

## Meeting the Standard

To "meet the standard" on the new state tests, students will have to demonstrate proficiency over challenging academic content, including subject-matter knowledge, application of such knowledge to real-world situations, and analytical skills appropriate for the content and grade level. Meeting the standard will mean reaching a certain level of performance or score on the test. For fourth graders, students will need to earn a score of 400 (out of 600 possible points) in each subject area (the scores needed to reach the standard on the seventh and tenth grade tests have not been set yet). The number of questions it takes to earn a score of 400 and meet the standard varies in each subject area and will vary each year depending on the difficulty of the test questions.

The fourth grade scoring standards were set by a panel of judges made up of fourth grade teachers, parents, and community members who are knowledgeable about the skills and knowledge fourth graders should be able to learn. The judges set the performance standards without knowing how many students who took the test would meet the standards. Instead, they intended for the standards to be realistic yet challenging and to reflect the level of performance fourth graders should be expected to meet. A similar scoring process will be undertaken for the seventh and tenth grade tests.

## Accountability for Results

All schools will be required to report their test scores to the public so local communities can hold their schools accountable for ensuring that all students are measuring up to the new academic standards. For the first time, parents and communities will have a clear measure of how well their schools are performing and where the strengths and weaknesses lie - and a clear responsibility to help struggling schools improve.

Different Tests for Different Purposes:

## Norm-Referenced vs. Criterion-Referenced

Norm-referenced tests measure student performance against a norm or an average score other students taking the test have received. This information can be useful in some situations, but it isn't very helpful in letting people find out what exactly students know and are able to do. Norm-referenced tests don't say how well a student has learned certain skills or knowledge; they say how well a student did compared to everyone else who took the test. Parents are probably most familiar with the CTBS norm-referenced test, which all Washington fourth and eighth grade students take.

Criterion-referenced tests score students based on how well they did against specific criteria - or standards - rather than on how well they did compared to other students taking the test. Washington's new state-level assessment will be a "criterion-referenced" test. Measuring students against specific, absolute criteria or standards will give teachers and parents better information to know exactly what they can do to improve a student's performance.

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# Ten Questions Parents Ought to Ask Schools

### Is This the Right School for My Child?

What information is available to help parents choose among various local public schools?

How can parents schedule visits to various schools to observe classrooms and talk to principals and teachers?

### How is This School Changing?

Every school should always be working to improve itself.

What is this school doing to adapt to the new state academic standards?

How is this school incorporating new technologies in the classroom?

Are teachers continuing to improve their skills?

### What Skills and Knowledge will My Child be Expected to Master This Year (or Month or Quarter)?

For example, what should all children know and be able to do in math by the end of the second grade?

When will they be expected to be able to read?

What books are they reading?

Are expectations clear?

Do students know what academic standards they are expected to meet?

Are parents fully informed about what this school's academic standards are?

### How does This School (and/or This Teacher) Accommodate Students with Different Learning Styles or Different Backgrounds?

Are all students encouraged to learn as much as they can, as fast as they're able?

Are students who need more time to master a subject given the time they need?

Are teachers trained to understand and appreciate the differences among students?

Are school school at tutoring programs available for students who need more help?

### Do Students Understand the Real-World Usefulness of What They are Learning in School?

Does the curriculum connect classroom learning with practical skills students can use at home or in their future jobs?

Are children encouraged to think about and study a wide variety of career interests from a very early age?

Do all students understand that working hard in school will have a direct effect on how they will fare when they grow up?

### How is Computer Technology Used to Improve Student Learning in This School?

How knowledgeable is my child's teacher about using computers to help children learn?

Are computers used just as a substitute for textbooks, or to provide new opportunities and methods of learning?

How does the teacher know whether anything of value is learned from the computer?

Is there a long-term plan for integrating new technologies in this school?

### How are Tests Used?

What kinds of tests are used and why?

Which skills and knowledge do these tests measure?

How do they relate to the work students do in the classroom?

Are tests used to improve teaching and learning by identifying strengths and weaknesses, or merely to sort students into groups?

Are parents informed about how the school determines that students are academically ready for promotion to the next grade?

### How Do Teachers Inform Parents About Their Children's Progress?

Do report cards give parents specific information about what children are learning?

Is there a way for parents to know, on a daily basis, what homework their children have been assigned? (Some teachers record a daily or weekly phone message so parents can call in and find out about assignments and activities; if your teacher doesn't do this, you might suggest that the school set up such a program.)

What happens when a student falls behind, and how soon are parents informed?

What strategies and resources are available to help students who are having difficulty?

### What are the Student Discipline Policies in This School?

Are there clear and consistent expectations that students will treat their teachers and each other with respect?

Are parents notified immediately if their children fail to live up to those expectations?

Are parents notified immediately if their children have been harassed or victimized by other students?

Is there a dress code?

What role do parents play in setting and helping to maintain discipline policies?

### How are Parents Involved in Making School Policy?

Does this school have a site council made up of parents, teachers, and the principal?

What decisions does the council make?

When and where does it meet?

Are there volunteer opportunities for parents and community members in this school?

Is there an active PTA?

Is there a tutoring program?

Are parents, local businesses, and others actively engaged in connecting students to the community outside the classroom?

# PARENTS AS TEACHERS:

REINFORCING LEARNING AT SCHOOL WITH LEARNING AT HOME AND IN THE COMMUNITY

THE FOLLOWING PAGES SUGGEST SOME WAYS THAT YOU CAN HELP YOUR CHILD BECOME AN EFFECTIVE AND EAGER LEARNER. WASHINGTON'S NEW, HIGHER STANDARDS COVER EIGHT ACADEMIC SUBJECT AREAS. THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES SUGGEST THINGS YOU CAN DO AT HOME TO HELP YOUR CHILD MEET THEM.

Washington's clear, rigorous standards spell out exactly what we want children to learn in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and other important areas. Clear standards will help focus and improve teaching and learning in schools - but parents still play the most important role by encouraging their children to apply themselves, work hard, and study.

Parents can do a great deal to ensure their children are meeting higher academic standards at school. Children spend far more time at home than they do in school. How they spend their time at home makes all the difference. And the way parents connect home life with what children learn at school lets children know why learning is important.

When your child helps you cook, for instance, you can help develop his or her knowledge of math (when measuring ingredients or calculating how to double a recipe), chemistry (learning what happens when certain ingredients are combined), and reading (directions in a recipe or the information on a package label). If the recipe is a traditional family dish, cooking it together can also be a history lesson, a cultural experience, and an exercise in story telling - which is, of course, the source of all great literature. Help your child understand how these activities relate back to school studies in reading, math, social studies, or whatever.

Children are learning something during every waking hour. Parents should be in charge of how much they learn, what they learn, and who they learn it from. Ensuring that they have a healthy menu of learning opportunities is just as important to developing healthy minds as a well-balanced diet is to developing healthy bodies. Recognizing and making the most of the learning opportunities in everyday life can make a big difference in the success of every child.

**Feed your child's curiosity about the world 365 days a year. Visit zoos, museums, and cultural events together, and help your daughter or son learn everything possible about what they see and experience. Don't assume that learning only takes place in school; think of your community as a "school without walls" for your child. Look for summer programs that enrich and extend your child's learning; if there aren't any, consider banding together with other parents to create them.**

## ACTIVITIES TO DO AT HOME

### READING

Learning to read unlocks the secrets of the world - secrets like which rest room is for boys and which is for girls and which baseball team won last night and which one lost. All children want to read; helping them master this skill is one of the most exciting parts of parenting.

- Read stories to a young child; ask an older child to read to you.
- Make sure your child sees you reading - newspapers, magazines, books, food labels, recipes, and mail.
- Encourage reading for other purposes beyond school. At the breakfast table, help your daughter or son read the cereal box. At the grocery store or on the road, read signs. Encourage your child to read the newspaper.
- Make sure that there are always books in your house that are appropriate to your child's reading level and interests - and maybe even set aside "family reading time" where all family members read on their own.
- Ask friends, neighbors, and teachers to share the names of favorite books. Use your local library and, as early as possible, get your child a library card. If you can, subscribe to children's magazines.

### WRITING

Children take great pride in their ability to learn to make letters, to write their own names, and to compose notes and stories. Encouraging these efforts and praising children's progress stimulates greater achievement.

- When it's time to make a grocery list, let your child write it.
- When someone gives your child a gift or does her a favor, have your child write a thank you note on their own.
- On holidays, help your child make cards and write greetings to friends and relatives. On family vacations, encourage him or her to keep journals and scrapbooks, and work with your child to correct errors, add important details, and learn new words.
- Show your pride in your child's work by keeping it in a special place for family heirlooms, or by displaying it on a bulletin board or refrigerator.

### COMMUNICATION

Like a lot of what children learn in school, communication skills aren't just necessary for academic success; they're essential for getting along with other people and leading a good life. Knowing when to speak up for ourselves, when to listen, and how to express ourselves clearly and appropriately are all skills that children absorb from the examples we set as well as the skills we try to teach.

That's why it's so important to help your son or daughter learn to participate in real, give-and-take conversations.

- Encourage your child to listen to family stories and then retell them in his or her own words.
- Turn off the TV during dinner so that family

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**Encourage your child to develop strong relationships with other adults who will support your efforts to raise a healthy, successful child. Aunts, uncles, grandparents, neighbors and friends are all valuable sources of knowledge. An uncle who's a truck driver can help your child learn geography; a neighbor who's an engineer can show your child how triangles help hold up a bridge. These relationships help your child understand how learning is connected to real life, and why it's important to work hard in school.**

conversation during meals becomes a habit.

- Ask your child questions about the things he or she has watched on television and in the movies. Ask about books being read.

- Help children develop the skill to recap what they have seen or heard and to express their opinions about it.

- Children's chatter may sometimes wear you out, but remember: children who talk - and who are listened to - are developing a skill that will make an immeasurable difference in the quality of their lives.

## SCIENCE

Encourage your child's gift for close observation of the natural world, and help him or her learn to use this ability to predict changes, to analyze natural processes, and to ask good questions. These are the fundamental skills of the scientist. Most children naturally ask "scientific" questions as soon as they're able to talk. Youngsters of all ages are curious and love to investigate. They want to know why the sky is blue, why flowers bloom, and why the furnace makes the house warm.

Parents don't need to have a strong background in science to help their children learn science. And you don't have to know the answers to all their questions, but you can help them find the answers by going to the library, or, if you have a home computer, by consulting more high-tech reference materials.

- Even if you don't know much about science yourself, you can help your child develop the skills to excel in this subject simply by encouraging the habit of close observation, precise recording of data, and careful experimentation.

- If you take your child to visit a pond, for instance, you can observe and record how many different kinds of plants and animals live there. You might collect samples of different kinds of leaves, and consult a book to identify each of them. Your child could make a list of all the plants and animals, draw pictures of them, or press samples of different kinds of leaves and label them.

- If your child helps you bake a cake, he or she can practice measuring ingredients correctly, and you can explain that the recipe is the product of "experiments" that have yielded the right formula for this kind of cake. (You might mention how many times someone might have failed before they got the recipe right, too!)

- When you go fishing, you and your child might discuss how fish "breathe" underwater, how you can tell a trout from a salmon, and how logging, farming, or other human activities may affect fish by changing conditions in streams, lakes, and oceans.

- Remember, it's not so important to have answers to children's inquiries as it is to encourage them to keep asking questions and to help them find the answers by carefully observing, investigating, and finding resources that answer their questions. You can help propose answers, test them out, and check them with someone else.

**When you ask your child what he or she did in school today, don't take "oh nothing" for an answer. Ask more questions. Did they read a book? What was it? Was it interesting? Did they do math? What did they study in math? It's important that your child knows that you have more than a passing interest in what he or she does at school. The more questions you ask, the stronger the message you send that learning is important.**

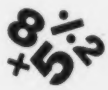
## ACTIVITIES TO DO AT HOME

### SOCIAL SCIENCES

Geography, civics, and history are part of our daily lives and our own family's story. A family photo album is an important history book; the story of how you came to live in your current house is a lesson in geography and economics. Starting from these immediate and personal premises, all children can learn to see that they are part of a larger whole, and part of a long story of human development.

- Very young children like to draw maps of the rooms in their house or their neighborhood - especially if doing so is part of a treasure hunt for a birthday party.
- Nearly all children are naturally fond of atlases and globes of the earth. Encourage this interest by keeping an atlas in your living room, by buying a puzzle of the United States, and by having your child follow your route on a map when you travel.
- Talk about what plants and animals live in different parts of the country and the world, and where oil comes from, and where your family's ancestors lived.
- Help your child learn where different states are and the names of the state capitols.
- The Washington Department of Transportation, local chambers of commerce, car rental companies, and travel clubs often provide free state, city, or neighborhood maps.
- Use your family's history to help your child understand how history connects us with the past.
- Visit the historical sites in your community, and seek out historical markers and museums when you travel.
- Encourage children to read biographies of historical figures and stories from different times and cultures.
- Talk about events in the news and help your child decide which ones are related to historical events.
- When you vote, talk to your child about the decisions you're making and why they're important. When you participate in your local neighborhood association or other community activities, include your child when possible, and explain why it's important for everyone to care for their community and their country.
- Make sure your daughter or son participates regularly in volunteer activities that build a sense of citizenship and civic responsibility. Children can do important things - like helping to restore a stream, picking up litter, and collecting food for the local food bank.

### MATH




Math is adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing - and much more. It is a language and a method for solving problems - problems that involve numbers, shapes, patterns, estimation, measurement, and a host of concepts that relate to them. The most important way to help children master math is to build confidence in their own ability to reason, to solve problems,

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**Keep track of homework assignments. Some teachers now give parents a number to call for a recorded message of that day's homework assignments; others put the information on the Internet. If your school doesn't offer these features, talk to the teacher about how you can access this vital information. Even if there aren't specific homework assignments, find out how you can stay informed about what your child is working on that you can help with at home.**

to explain how they found answers or solutions, and to judge whether their answers are reasonable.

Those of us who were taught that math was too mysterious and complicated for us to learn should be happy to know that teachers don't send that message anymore - or at least, most of them don't. Most schools and teachers know that girls can learn math as well as boys, and that seamstresses are just as sophisticated mathematicians as carpenters.

There are thousands of ways to encourage children to develop their mathematical skill in daily life.

- At the grocery store, involve your child in tracking down bargains and comparing prices. At a baseball game, teach your son or daughter about the math of batting averages and other statistics. When you're cooking together, let your child make the calculations about how much flour you'll need to make a double batch of cookies.
- Ask a young child to name the geometric shapes of cans, boxes, pizzas and books. Ask an older child to calculate how much milk your family consumes per day or per week, or to clip coupons and calculate how much you will save by using them.
- On trips, have a child estimate how many miles you've come, and how many miles till you arrive at your destination, or how many gallons of gas it will take to get you there.
- Encourage children to do math calculations in their heads.
- Emphasize to your child that problems in math may have only one solution, but there may be many ways to get the right answer. When working on math problems with your child, ask, "Could you tell me how you got that answer?" Your child's way might be different from yours. If the answer is correct and the strategy or way of solving it worked, it is a great alternative.
- By encouraging children to talk about what they are thinking, we help them become stronger mathematicians.

## THE ARTS

Recent research shows that children who learn music do better in math. And though there may not be statistics to prove it, most teachers will also tell you that children who are involved with music and art are more creative and imaginative, feel more connected to history and civics, and are more appreciative of the richness and joy of being alive.

Those are pretty powerful reasons to encourage your child's expressiveness and creativity. And there are easy, inexpensive ways to do so:

- Keep crayons and other art supplies handy. Collect empty shoe boxes, cardboard tubes, egg cartons, and other

**Spend time in the classroom. The best way to know what goes on in your child's school is to spend time there. For most working parents, this isn't easy, and most of us can't do this very often. But "not very often" is immensely better than "never."**

simple things that children can use to make art projects or to use in imaginative play.

- Encourage your child to create and perform skits, plays, puppet shows or musical performances for family gatherings. Sing silly songs with your child, learn to recite favorite poems together, and consider signing your child up for private music, dance, or art lessons.

- It's also important for children to see and experience the best of our cultural heritage. Take your son or daughter to museums, musical performances, poetry readings, and other cultural events, and talk about the art and the artists who created it.

## Health and Fitness

It's easy to assume that children just naturally understand why they should say no to drugs and alcohol, or what happens to people who smoke a lot of cigarettes. But those assumptions are dangerously wrong. Parents need to talk about important health and fitness issues with their children throughout their young lives.

It's easy to integrate learning about the importance of good nutrition, cleanliness, and exercise in your child's daily routine. When you buy and cook food, wash hands before meals, or brush teeth at bedtime, you are already teaching your child important lessons about health and fitness.

Similarly, when you play catch after dinner, go rollerblading, biking, or work in your garden together, you're building the healthy habit of getting regular exercise.

- To make the most of these activities, talk about why they're important and how they contribute to leading a long and healthy life.

- Make sure your child understands that washing hands gets rid of germs that cause disease; that exercise strengthens hearts and lungs as well as arms and legs; and that eating fruits and vegetables helps protect people from vitamin deficiencies that cause blindness, anemia, and other diseases.

- And remember that when it comes to teaching these lessons, the greatest likelihood of success comes from teaching by example!

**Act as if you own your child's school. As a parent, a taxpayer, and a citizen, you do own the school. You are truly in charge of your child's education. This doesn't mean that parents need to be obnoxious to get what we want; obviously, we need to praise good teaching when we see it, and to be diplomatic about the things we want to see improved.**

e encourage you to contact Partnership for Learning to answer questions or receive more information about Washington's new standards and its school improvement efforts.

Partnership for Learning is an independent, non-profit organization supported by Washington business and community leaders. Its purpose is to increase public awareness about Washington's efforts to raise the academic standards in our public schools.


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For more information, call 1-800-550-5437 or see our website at http://www.partnership-wa.org

Copies of the *Parent's Guide* also can be downloaded from the Partnership's website.


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